

Artefacts of History: Archaeology, Historiography and Indian Pasts
By Sudesha Guha

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Scholarship on the historiography and mapping of the creation of India's archaeological knowledge has proliferated in recent years. Guha's monograph is a welcome addition to this growing field, and interrogates the established narratives of the creation and dissemination of archaeological knowledge in India. She successfully challenges the evolutionary history of disciplinary progress within archaeology, and casts a critical eye towards the search for 'origins' and the celebration of 'discoveries' and archives within archaeological discourse, phenomena still widely observable in Indian archaeological research today. In her examination of the historical relationship between methodologies, inferences and the subject of enquiries within archaeology, Guha demonstrates how the practices and scholarship of archaeology and traditions of historiography are themselves 'artefacts of history'. She calls upon archaeologists and historians to question inherited disciplinary attitudes, practices and claims about the past.

Her introductory chapter presents the aims of the book and sets the stage for the four main areas she critically appraises in the history of Indian archaeological research. Chapter One covers the roots of antiquarian practices and colonial historiography's role in dictating present ideas of histories of archaeological research. Chapter Two presents the relationship between the politics of imperialism and the local histories of museums in India through the example of the curation of Assyrian collections in Bombay in the mid-nineteenth century. Chapter Three shows the uncertainties and anxieties of the development of philology in colonial India and its relationship with archaeology; and Chapters Four and Five

cover the theoretical history of scholarship of the Indus Civilization and its effects on colonial and nationalist heritage. Her concluding chapter, *A Vision for Archaeology*, addresses the creation and proliferation of 'nationalist' archaeology prior to Partition; its relationship with communalism and positivism; and its systemic exclusion of issues concerning gender, interdisciplinary research and pluralism.

In her discussion about antiquarian practices in India, Guha joins other critics of colonial historiography by questioning historians' tendencies to follow the colonial 'origin story' in Indian archaeology, providing examples of pre-colonial and indigenous historical investigations. She contextualizes and criticizes the commonly-held attitude by archaeologists that field discoveries are more important than text-based philological scholarship, demonstrating how colonial antiquarian scholarship used visualization within knowledge claims to define notions of true histories, 'correct' observations and 'proper' modes of historical enquiry. The Assyrian displays exhibited in Bombay (discussed in Chapter Two), demonstrates how the politics of imperialism came alive visually. This case study provides a synthesis of the ideas covered in the book, demonstrating how the production and representation of archives, artefacts and social memory come to form the historiography of archaeological practice. The reasons behind the distance between philology and field studies within Indian archaeology is further explored in Chapter Three, which is a critical read for all South Asian archaeologists.

The fourth chapter, fifth chapter and conclusion will be of particular interest to Indus archaeologists. Although Guha covers fairly familiar ground in her discussion about how theoretical influences from North America and Europe define Indus Civilization research, these chapters raise provocative questions that must be considered by researchers and students studying the Indus Civilization. These include being wary of following established conventions of interpretations (that are often guided by essentialist, colonialist or nationalist frameworks) and interrogating why certain narratives and questions have come to dominate Indus research. Also of relevance is Guha's discussion on the creation of civilizational heritage through archaeological scholarship. She notes how 'heritage industries' in India mutate and conflate conflicting historiographical traditions, a trend that reflects a general lack of engagement with historiographical constructions. Finally, the concluding chapter touches upon a myriad of issues that are central to all archaeological research in India today, particularly multivocality and plurality in archaeological representation and research.

Two themes are prominently explored throughout this book. Firstly, the value of investigating networks and relationships between persons involved in the documentation and creation of India's past, not just the history of institutions or 'officialese' archives. Guha mines several sources—archives, personal correspondences, photographs, textbooks and material objects—to recreate the politics of professional (and personal) relationships and social networks embedded within the histories of archaeological knowledge creation. Secondly, Guha demonstrates how the very acts of archiving or collecting, and the neglect of certain archives, create epistemic truisms. Life histories of collections and archives convey how certain histories of archaeology are created or erased, and archaeologists of South Asia must actively be more reflexive in their practices and question why some evidence is more visible and considered more 'accurate' than others.

Guha's book is an important contribution to historiography and archaeology in India. Contrary to other histories of archaeology of the subcontinent, it does not have a structured, linear argument or a narrative of the history of archaeological research. Instead, it highlights different moments within the histories of archaeology in India, demonstrating that they each require much more critical engagement by those who study them. Guha's book is a reminder of subcontinental archaeologists' failure to recognize the historical ties between objectivity, 'dogmatic empiricism' (the proclivity towards positivism in archaeology), and national and imperial politics; and presents the challenges that lie in the future towards pluralistic, interdisciplinary and multivocal archaeological research within the 'national' heritage agenda.